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C O N F I D E N T I A L AMMAN 008299

SIPDIS

CPA FOR TRENT/WILLIS/WAYNE

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SUBJECT: RESUMPTION OF JORDANIAN BAGHDAD FLIGHTS DELAYED

REF: AMMAN 7647

Classified By: DCM David Hale, Reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: Almost four weeks after suspending daily Amman-Baghdad passenger flights following a November 22 MANPADS strike on a DHL cargo aircraft, Royal Jordanian (RJ) has informed us that they are hoping to resume flights December 19, pending confirmation of insurance coverage and approval of the Jordanian Government. Royal Jordanian had been planning to resume the service with an Iraqi-owned Boeing 737 wet-leased to RJ, but is now looking at continuing to work with DeHavilland Dash 8 turboprops owned by its Royal Wings subsidiary. GOJ approval apparently requires further internal assessment of threat information that was developed by a Jordanian intelligence agency, which seems unlikely by December 19. End Summary.

2. (C) RJ tells us that it is prepared to resume Royal Wings passenger flights to and from Baghdad as soon as Friday, December 19, pending final resolution of insurance issues and approval of the government of Jordan. While RJ officials believe the insurance issues will be resolved quickly, GOJ approval -- which has been withheld due to Jordanian concerns over the threat to Jordanian aviation in Iraq --has not been forthcoming as of Thursday, December 18. According to RJ CEO Samer Majali, the Government of Jordan believes it has intelligence information of a specific threat to the Royal Wings flight. The government is currently analyzing the information.

3. (C) Majali also tells us that at the request of CPA officials, the airline has dropped a plan to operate a 737 owned by the Jordan-based Iraqi Khawam family that would be leased to RJ but operated under an Iraqi flag (see reftel). This means that when and if flights resume, it will be with a 42-seat DASH-8 turboprop owned by Royal Wings, an RJ subsidiary. Flights should continue to fly out of Amman's Marka airport.

4. (C) Resumption of flights has been delayed by a series of obstacles. The initial suspension of flights was announced November 23, pending a security assessment of the perimeter of Baghdad International Airport (BIAP) following the attack on a DHL cargo jet. When the assessment found that the nature of the attack was more worrying than had initially been thought, flights were further suspended while the U.S. military upgraded its presence around BIAP. Negotiations with insurers caused a further delay, followed by a dispute with the lessor of the DASH-8 that RJ was flying. Once these issues had been resolved, RJ received the request from GOJ not to fly for security reasons. Insurance again became an issue after a C-17 was hit by a SAM outside of BIAP on December 10.

5. (C) COMMENT: Both RJ's CEO Samer Majali and Ghassan Ali, RJ's Vice President and chief negotiator, were decidedly unenthusiastic about the prospect of working with the Khawams, which they had agreed to do only under pressure from Iraqi Transportation Minister Boulos. RJ apparently feared that once flights were renewed using a Khawam airplane, the Khawams would then move to muscle RJ off the route. Jordanian intelligence agencies are continuing to assess the information developed about a threat to the flight. It is not clear how long this process (which is also being discussed in intelligence channels) will take, but resumption of information on December 19 seems highly unlikely.
GNEHM